

## Examining the Essential Employability Attributes from Different Perspectives

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Graduate employability is an important outcome for vocational education. Adopting the categorisation of employability attributes as proposed by Saunders and Zuzel (2010), this study explores the perceptions on essential attributes from the perspective of teachers, students and employers.

Employing a mixed method, the first part of the study attempts to identify the attributes in the Whole Person Development (WPD) modules students and teachers treasured. Results demonstrated that there are different opinions among teachers, students from Higher Diploma courses (HD) and Diploma in Vocational Education courses (DVE). Thirty one teachers and 118 students interviewed considered 'dependability', and 'oral communication' as important while students cited 'timekeeping/punctuality' and teachers rated 'team-working' as essential attributes. In interpreting these attributes, students studying DVE tended to report behavioural aspects while students studying HD discern the deeper attitudinal aspects. Students also tended to focus more on attributes related to personal competencies, such as 'attention to detail', 'decisiveness' and 'enthusiasm' while teachers emphasised on those that demand interaction with environments, such as 'written communication' (interaction with people), 'adaptability' (interaction with novel stimuli) and 'tolerance to stress' (interaction with overloading external demands). Despite the variance on depths of opinion, students in general emphasised the development of individual attributes while teachers underscored the importance of personal adjustments to environments.

In the second part of the study, sample job placement reports with high, medium and low marks from 6 HD disciplines and 167 reports collected from another HD discipline were analyzed in accordance to their performance. Most employers/supervisors considered the students' performance were satisfactory. The most cited attributes of the placement students were 'dependable', 'enthusiastic', and 'responsive in the workplace'. They perceived students as responsible and willing to learn; and would be willing to offer full-time employment for most students if conditions allowed. In other words, students were ready for immediate employment. However, there were relatively few comments on attributes which can help transcending beyond immediate employment towards continual career development. This includes 'leadership', 'adapting and overcoming situations' and 'vivid presentation skills'.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that earlier exposure to job relevant activities, such as job placement and career programs in relation to students' career path, can minimise the discrepancies between teachers' and students' perceptions on employability attributes. In addition, training on divergent thinking could be introduced in response to the accelerating velocity of the vocational market in the future.

### Reference:

Saunders, V. & Zuzel, K. (2010). Evaluating employability skills: employer and student perceptions. *Bioscience Education*, 15.